

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER (1)

A Better Way to Improve School Performance

Tomorrow's schools will require leaders at all levels who are talented, self-motivated team players, people who thrive on challenge and change. But how is this to be achieved ?

Martin Straker-Welds, an independent Education Consultant and Steve Trivett an experienced Organisation Development Adviser and Change Coach, believe that now is a good time for schools to revolutionise their approach to leadership, learning and change.

INTRODUCTION

Tapping into people's natural energy resources

This discussion paper makes the case for an independent agency and support network capable of providing quality coaching and consultancy to improve leadership at all levels in schools. Coaching, consultancy and leadership skills are no longer the preserve of people at the top. Everyone in a school should have access to the tools and techniques that can improve their work and their self-esteem. They need support to overcome external obstacles and challenges to help them overcome the internal barriers that limit their full potential

What we are talking about here is introducing and developing more purposeful and intuitive techniques capable of tapping the natural energy and passion of teachers at all levels. We want them to revive their authenticity, self-confidence and pride in serving others. Coaching for example can help reduce the amount of psychological baggage and energy sapping habits that have a negative impact on performance.

Maximising potential and minimising interference

There is now considerable evidence to suggest that when people and organisations focus on their inner leadership skills they are more likely to tap into people's natural talent, and not let outside assessments affect their performance. The inspection process as it operates today is energy sapping, introducing self-doubt and fear of failure. This is restricting the flow of energy and creativity available to all of us when the conditions are right. Standards may be up, but morale and passion for the job are dropping fast. This trend needs to be addressed or the profession will lose the people who can make change happen.

High quality coaching

A new initiative is needed, one that can bring together educational advisers, head teachers, independent consultants and stakeholder agencies, to form a new leadership support network that we have named **Heads & Co**. Its key role would be to promote high quality coaching and consultancy in schools.

Leadership for free

The focus will be on turning schools into ‘leadership communities’, places where leadership talent is encouraged and developed in all its forms and at all levels. It’s about putting the passion back into teaching and learning. Everyone has leadership potential – it’s distributed through the organisation. Fostering it however, may mean that Teachers become just as comfortable learning for leadership as they are at displaying leadership for learning.

Playing the game

Schools have shown themselves to be adept at playing the external game, progress is now needed to improve the ‘inner game’ that is improving ourselves, our relationships and our communication skills. This way, schools stand a chance of recapturing the harmony that a love of learning is meant to generate.

CREATING LEADERSHIP COMMUNITIES

Leadership or management

We tend to think of leaders as people who can get other people to do what they don’t want to do – and like it. This kind of leadership has its place, but leadership today is more about the ability to think broadly, see the connections and engaging others in making the changes that they want to see happen. This makes it a whole school development issue. Ideally, this requires coaches and consultants familiar with the moral imperatives that drive school cultures, and who know how to help others develop collaborative working, build confidence, grow talent and foster a commitment to continuous improvement among staff at all levels.

This should not be confused with management, which focuses on processes, procedures, resource allocation and administration. This creates a culture that prefers predictability, conformity and standardisation. What schools need now more than ever is creativity, spontaneity, entrepreneurship and the courage to do what works in a given context.

Creating a sense of community

If all staff were proactive in creating and living a shared vision of what their school could look like and feel like, they would find it easier to achieve. It's about tapping into and valuing everyone's contribution. One way is to build and then maintain a 'leadership community', where everyone feels their contribution is having an impact the school's performance.

Whole teams must learn new strategies, communicate with passion, develop high energy habits, maximise synergy, minimise strain and inquire with empathy and appreciation. The senior management team may need to initiate, develop and maintain strong relationships to develop and use their leadership coaching skills.

In a leadership community, everyone believes they are not just the passive consumers of externally driven change, they can be proactive to make change happen, and in ways that are meaningful and motivating.

CLARITY AND FOCUS

Leadership roles can take many different forms and operate at different levels. Strategic leadership for example, concerns itself with the direction and governance of the organisation as a whole. Operational leadership roles are often more concerned with the development of good relationships and improvements in performance. Team leaders may focus on securing smooth and effective interactions to ensure that tasks are performed to a high standard.

By valuing diversity, schools can become vehicles for seeding leadership behaviours of many different types across the organisation and thereby stimulate new thinking and practice. A whole school approach to leadership will inevitably challenge the positional, professional and personal focus of leadership behaviour, allowing each school will find a balance that works for them.

Operating Principles

To be successful, a nationally accredited network of education coaches and consultants must ensure that a coherent set of principles for this new approach to leadership development are embedded into every corner of school life.

Organisational change has to be mediated through tools and people who can use dialogue and multiple perspectives to access the energy available in a group for purposeful activity. This should be the role of the education coach/consultant.

Such an agency and network could be expected to:

1. Operate primarily as a focal point for commission's specialist training that accredits coaches and consultants working in schools.
2. Promote models for leadership development that fit their local circumstances and school community needs.
3. Enable appropriately accredited coaches and consultant to develop a national network for innovation and information exchange and development.
4. To stimulate creative thinking on leadership coaching in schools at a national, regional and local level.
5. Generate partnerships with other leadership training agencies and connections with international agencies
6. Develop robust evaluation methodologies for the work of its coaches and consultants

Some Underlying Assumptions

The proposals outlined in this paper are based on a number of key assumptions.

1. That there is a significant difference between leadership and management, and that leadership can be developed through team learning and individual coaching.
2. That schools are looking to improve the leadership capabilities of all their senior managers and departmental teams.
3. That there is a demand in schools for appropriately accredited and supported Coaches and Consultants.

PRODUCTS & INITIATIVES

Working in partnership with the Primary Education Trust and a leading academic institution, the network will test the market and develop a framework for the type of experience, training expected of registered Mentors and Coaches.

A National Agency/Network

It is anticipated that proposals to establish Heads & Co emerge from a series of one day conferences on the "The Next Steps" for school improvement. They are being sponsored during 2003/4 by the National Primary Trust.

A Support Network for Education Coaches and Consultants

The objective would be to prototype a service in 2003/2004 with a minimum of 25 qualified and experienced Leadership Coaches with at least 10 relationships brokered in schools.

Accredited Training for Education Coaches and Consultants

The objective here would be to offer at least one network sponsored Leadership Coaching Programme with a cohort of 12, to Education Advisers and Independent Consultants who are undertaking or wishing to develop mentoring and coaching assignments in schools.

An Education Coach and Consultant Register/ Brokering Service.

The network could develop and advertise a brokering service for Heads and Senior Staff in schools to connect people searching for coaches with appropriately qualified and experienced people.

Developing a New Leadership Agenda

The network could launch an Exchange Programme in 2003/2004 that would enable 40 senior staff to gain experience of leadership in different school cultures and communities. Leadership skills would be developed through team-based learning. The 'new leadership' approach could be captured, disseminated and promoted through research reports, newsletters and conferences.

This could include:

After Action Reviews

Participants in the Exchange Programme attending a one-day reflection workshop to exchange notes, extract the lessons learned and work on action plans for their own personal development and development of their respective schools. They could maintain a dialogue with their host schools through the change process via a network website.

Leadership Circles

Schools would take their senior management team through a series of planned Team Leadership Coaching sessions. They would then be competent to coach other teams in their school or in the community, applying the techniques they have learned around systems thinking, vision building, inspired relationships, change dynamics, values based conversations and action learning.

Action Research Project

Pilot schools would be invited to write up their experience of creating leadership communities which would be edited and disseminated by the network as examples of good practice. This work will need a sponsor.

MOVING FORWARD

To bring the network into existence we need to build alliances with Heads, Education Advisors, and stakeholder agencies to develop a strategy that reflects a shared vision for the future of leadership in schools.

Links are currently being made with:

- The National Primary Trust – through Peter Frost
- Institute of Education - Warwick University – through Alma Harris
- School of Education – University of Birmingham – through Hywel Thomas

The intention is to hold a series conferences and workshops throughout 2003/4 to explore new leadership in schools. The agenda for change will be promoted through articles in professional magazines, on-line discussion groups and a web site.

A series of one day conferences will be sponsored by The National Primary Trust. Detailed proposals are contained in Discussion Paper (2) "Building an Agenda for New Leadership in Schools – the Next Steps."